

W r e s t l i n g

P e r s p e c t i v e

Volume IV § Issue 33 • The Forum For Professional Wrestling Debate • \$1.50

Why Can't Wrestling Succeed At TBS?

By - Michael McGowen

The history of pro wrestling at Turner Broadcasting has been one of missed opportunities, flip-flop confusion, and overall mismanagement. While the WWF has remained virtually stable, World Championship Wrestling has been a revolving door for both talent and management. Since 1988, there have been two presidents, four heads of operations, nine bookers and booking committees, and enough talent to stock four promotions with solid talent. Now, once again, turmoil has struck WCW management.

Bill Shaw and Bob Dhue have changed the flow of command, removing Bill Watts and Jim Ross, while creating an unwieldy structure that has nearly as many chiefs as Indians. At a time when most large companies are streamlining to improve efficiency and quality, WCW again defies common sense by dividing power amongst an even larger group of people. How this new arrangement will work, or the time until the next realignment, is anyone's guess. Considering past history, it won't and it won't take long.

Obviously the upper brass wasn't happy with the performance of Watts. House show attendance, television ratings, pay-per-view buy rates, and overall quality not only failed to improve, in most cases, they declined. Watts' accomplishment was the alienation of just about everyone in the company, from the wrestlers to the office personnel. All of this has lent credit to the belief that Watts is out of touch with the nineties wrestling world. But, and this question is rarely asked, when has TBS ever been in touch with the wrestling world?

Part of the WWF's success lies in the fact that it is headed by one man with a clear, single-minded vision of what he wants to accomplish. Vince McMahon grew up with pro wrestling. He understands it because it is the only business he knows. McMahon took the foundation laid by his father and made the WWF, and its wrestlers, household words, ultimately altering the public's perception of wrestling, for better or worse.

TBS has failed at the wrestling business because they never actually understood what to do with the promotion they bought from Jim Crockett. There's never been a defined purpose in anything they have done. It's been more like the proverbial "throw something against the wall and see what sticks" philosophy. WCW has been nothing more than an in-house source of air time, than anything else; one that is becoming less and less cost effective each week. Once the highest rated programming on TBS, *World Championship Wrestling*, *WCW Main Event*, and *WCW Power Hour* often find their ratings doubled by old movies or sit-coms that often pre-empt them. Simply stated, TBS has never been solidly behind the promotion in any shape or form. Any special moments over the past three years have been due to the extraordinary performances of the athletes and personalities, many of whom are now gone. Instead of looking in the mirror for the real causes of failure, TBS executives have answered problems by changing format, direction, bookers, and wrestlers without ever addressing the causes. WCW has become the living embodiment of the clichéd saying, "The more things change, the more they stay the same."

Actually, the biggest change that should take place in the ownership category. If you own something and have no idea what to do with it, you should get rid of it. WCW will never improve until it is owned by someone who really cares about pro wrestling and has the resources needed to make a run at the

hill occupied by McMahon. If any fan with business and marketing savvy wins a major lottery, or inherits a fortune, we might all be well served if he or she makes an offer to TBS.

Change has again come to WCW, or at least the management so far. How far

this new round of change will go remains to be seen, but let's hope that TBS does something right with WCW for a change. If they don't, then the fans will once again be the biggest losers.

Sidelines

Thanks To Jeff Cohen, Jeff Mullins, and Georgiann Makropoulos for the plugs.

Correction From Last Issue • Due to an editing error, minor portions of the Baby Doll interview in Issue 32 were omitted. From page six to seven, discussing Tully Blanchard, Baby Doll said, "My dad works with an AA program here in Lubbock and he said 'It's amazing how low some people get before they realize they have to start going back up.' It didn't take Tully to get down very far before he realized how bad it really was." From page 8 to 9, discussing Ric Flair, she said, "He still kids me because he flew in one time when he used to get hired out and spend two weeks in a territory like Kansas City and then he'd go to Texas for a couple of weeks and Minneapolis, when there was an NWA and he was the world champion."

Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly is the weekly publication by Wade Keller that qualifies as a "must-read." Every

issue features the latest news from the big two and the many smaller promotions, match results, and commentary. Plus Wade does an excellent job with Torch Talk, interviews with top players in the game, which appear about every other issue. Wade has also released his Winter Annual, which features, among other things, an interview with Terry Funk. *Pro Wrestling Torch Weekly*, is available from Wade Keller in four issue sets for \$6.00 each. The Annual is available for \$10. To order write to Pro Wrestling Torch, PO Box 201844, Minneapolis, MN 55420.

Speaking of Interviews • You can find intriguing interviews with Billy Graham, Stan Lane, Ivan Koloff, Rockin' Robin, Tommy Young, Jim Duggan, Larry Sharpe, Special Delivery Jones and Angelo Poffo only in *Wrestling Perspective: The Interviews*, a 60 page book chronicling the interviews that appeared in *Wrestling Perspective* during our first two and a half years. This is a fantastic

collection of insight, humor, and intrigue, that you are bound to read from cover to cover to cover to cover and over again. *Wrestling Perspective: The Interviews* is available for \$10 for subscribers and \$12 for non-subscribers. Quantities of this collection are limited, so send in your order today.

Subscription Information • *Wrestling Perspective* is a monthly publication, or thereabouts, available by subscription for \$1.25 per issue up to \$15.00 for 12 issues. Overseas subscription rates are \$2.25 per issue. Newsstand and over the counter rates are \$1.50 per issue. Please send your subscriptions, comments, letters to the editors, criticisms and suggestions to: *Wrestling Perspective*, PO Box 401, Camillus, NY 13031-0401. Please make checks payable to *Wrestling Perspective*. Checks returned for non-payment will be subject to a \$12.00 surcharge. All letters sent for publication may be edited and will not be returned.

In Perspective: Bobby Eaton

He is considered by many to be the greatest tag team wrestler of the past 10 years. Bobby Eaton has enjoyed successfully stints as a member of the Midnight Express with both

Dennis Condrey and Stan Lane and most recently as a tag team champion with Arn Anderson in the Dangerous Alliance. In this interview conducted by David Skolnick on

Jan. 27, 30 and Feb. 17, Eaton talks about his early days, how he got started with Condrey and Jim Cornette and his most recent tenure in WCW. Although Eaton is usually

a man of few words, here he openly discusses his thoughts and opinions on a variety of topics. Part II of this interview appears in next month's issue.

Wrestling Perspective: What do you think of the recent shake-up and Bill Watts' departure?

Bobby Eaton: The other people in the company were getting to him. They'd change things on him. He would come up with something and they would change it supposedly. I really don't know the whole story. At least with him, I knew we had direction and we were going somewhere.

WP: Did you think he was making good progress?

BE: Yeah. Not just cause Jim and I and Stan and Tom were there. Everything was good. He had some good little things going. I didn't get to watch all the shows, but as far as two or three TV's, he was pointed in the right direction. Now, I'm hoping WCW doesn't have to start all over with a new vice president and these kind of rules and have those kind of rules. The wrestlers will get fed up with this.

WP: Not a good move in your opinion?

BE: I don't know if it was a good move, I don't really know. I'm really worried about the wrestling fans. Probably have a guy come out the next time and say, "We're not going to do this or do that." To me, that messes the wrestling fan up. What's going to happen next. The fans were starting to watch it more. But there's only so much you can do. It's like the NFL changing their rules every six months.

WP: Now they've got this large booking committee.

BE: I don't even know who the 16 people can be. That's more guys than

are in Smoky Mountain Wrestling on a card.

WP: With all those personalities, it's going to be hard to get even the simplest things done.

BE: Sure. Watts would get to you. He was hard nosed. Years ago, you had to be like that. He didn't do everything to make everybody happy. At least you knew where he was going.

WP: Did he adapt to the times?

BE: It started out with putting a guy in an armbar for 15 minutes. That didn't get it. They adapted and put some glamour and show business into it.

WP: Comparing when he came in and when he left, there was improvement?

BE: Yeah. I think so. He let more get by like the fireworks and cameras. For a while, he took the ramp away for whatever that meant. I thought he was doing as good a job as anybody could in that position. Except maybe he couldn't take the guys that supposedly don't know anything about wrestling. I don't know if they know anything about wrestling or not. They're running it. They're the bosses.

WP: So where does this leave you?

BE: My contract's still good for starting back in April unless I start back before then. I'm worried about myself and my family. But I'm more worried about the wrestling business. Enough's enough. You had Kip Frey. I liked Kip, but you had a totally different show. You had talk shows. Then Bill came on and they said more or less, everything we'd seen before then was bullshit. I just don't think all this has been good for the wrestling fans.

WP: Cornette's probably not pleased by this. He was working directly with

Watts.

BE: Yeah. We haven't talked too much about it. Again, with Watts you knew what direction you were going.

WP: Is Cornette through with them?

BE: No, I don't think so. They've talked and they've made deals with Turner's people. To be honest with you, they'd probably love for Jim to come in and run the company.

WP: How do you think he'd do?

BE: I'm sure he'd do great. That's got to be a heavy load to satisfy 50 wrestlers and satisfy a guy above you who supposedly doesn't know anything about wrestling. I'm not sure if they know anything about wrestling, but everybody says they don't. For some of the moves they make, we can say, "That was the wrong move." But we don't know because we're not there. I'm sure they're trying to do what's best for the company. I would think they would be.

WP: Do you think Cornette would take it?

BE: I don't think so. He's got a lot to do with Smoky Mountain.

WP: Are you there short-term?

BE: With Cornette? I'm not sure how it's going to be. I'm not short-term with either of them.

WP: Could you do both?

BE: Sure, If they'd let me. I'd love to. If Cornette would let me and they would let me, which they can. Jimmy and Dusty have always had a good relationship. I'd like to see them work together like they have been.

WP: What led to your recent departure from WCW?

BE: Really what led to the departure as

far as I'm concerned is that I've been there for a while. I wanted to make some changes and they wanted to make some changes. We're still talking right now. If we come to an agreement on certain things, then I'll wrestle for WCW. Maybe I'll continue to wrestle for Smoky Mountain Wrestling.

WP: Like you said, you've been there for a number of years and recently, they've had you do so many jobs. They reportedly said that there was no freshness with you. If you left for a few months and came back, there would be more freshness.

BE: That was brought up. I don't know. Dave Winfield's been in the World Series. He's been playing for years and years and he keeps hitting home runs and he keeps getting base hits and he keeps playing good defense. As long as I could deliver, I consider that quite an athlete.

WP: What are your feelings on Bill Watts?

BE: I like Bill Watts. He's got direction. Somebody's got to be in charge. Somebody's got to make the rules stick. Some guys, I don't want to name no names, were not making some dates. If you don't make your dates in these towns, people get tired of seeing you. "I'm not going to see WCW because they've had more substitute matches." As far as Bill Watts, I've always gotten along fine with him. He's just a businessman.

WP: How do you think he did as far as direction the company?

BE: As far as TV's and everything else goes, he did some good TV's. He's had a lot of competitive matches going and everybody was working harder. He can get a little too hard on you at times. That's part of being the boss, I guess.

The other vice president, I got along great with him too. He got kind of walked on a little bit.

WP: This would be K. Allen Frey?

BE: I didn't get a chance to deal with him a lot, but he seemed like a real nice guy. I meant Jim Herd. I got along with him great. He had a couple of guys, really a bunch of guys who did mostly whatever they wanted to do.

WP: It's ironic you'd say you got along with Jim Herd when it was obvious that Corny and Stan had their problems with him.

BE: When I said that I got along good with him, I meant I never had any words with him. I heard some things that somebody told me he said. Jimmy told me this. He doesn't care. Cornette doesn't care what people know about him and Jim Herd. When Jimmy and Stan left, he called me on two different occasions wanting me to stay with the company. Now, I don't know if he wanted me to stay because they left or he just wanted more publicity. He offered me more money. I'd say I got along good with him. I never had no problems with him as far as business deals go. You always want to make a lot more money than you make. If you've got \$1 million, you want \$2 million.

WP: What do you think of the way they were handling you and Arn?

BE: I don't think they handled us right, but you know, I've had my share of so-called main events. All I really cared about was making a living for my family and doing the best job I could whether I was getting pushed or at what level I was getting pushed.

WP: There are so few people who can lose and still maintain heat. I could

only think of three off hand: yourself, Arn and Ric Flair.

BE: (laughs) That's got to be true. The reason some guys can't get beat is because if they get beat, it's like striking out four times in baseball and you come back the next time and get a hit, if you can do that. When they call you, they know you can get the job done anyway. They put you on the back burner for a while. As far as I know, they used me real good a couple of times. Then it was time for somebody else. That's the way I looked at it. I don't have an ego about this business. I'm just in it to make the most money I could. If a guy makes more money than me, I'm glad for him. I'm not jealous of nobody. If you are and get like that, you'll drive yourself crazy?

WP: You most recently worked with Paul E. Dangerously. What's he like?

BE: I don't know what he's doing now. I heard he was like fabricating some motel receipts or something like that. I got along good with Paul E. He was always honest with me. He was one of the guys that did his job real well. Always at the building, always did what they asked him. Got up and did the early morning radio shows after staying up all night. To me, there's always a place in the business for a guy like that. If you don't know Paul E., he'll get heat with you. If you just met him tomorrow and talked with him, you'd say, "That guy's an asshole." But to me, he's a damn good guy. Always treated me fair. Always checked on me. If we were on the road together, I'd check with him and he'd check with me to make sure everybody's okay. That's what he always did with me. That's the way I have to judge him, by the way he treated me.

WP: There's so few managers in the business who actually manage their talent, taking care of travel and hotels. Was Paul E. like that?

BE: Yeah, he did a lot of that. But Paul E. and me weren't like Jimmy and me. Jimmy's like my brother. I'd do anything for Jimmy. I'd do anything for Paul E. but we never got to be that kind of a bond like between Jimmy and I.

WP: Was it tough to work with another manager after Jim?

BE: It wasn't as good, it wasn't as exciting as working with Jimmy. I don't think anybody could say that. To me, he's the smartest guy in the wrestling business and he's smarter to a lot more than just wrestling. He lives and dies wrestling, but he's smart in other areas. This is just something he really, really loves. He loves the business.

WP: Now, you're working for him.

BE: Yeah. It's real good. I stay away from him at tapings because he gets all worked up. When I see him get a little Watts attack, I go to the next room.

WP: What do you think of Smoky Mountain?

BE: I think it stands a good chance. Their ratings are real good on TV. Their house shows have really picked up a whole lot. They're not drawing 10,000 people. They're not drawing 20,000 people. But who is drawing 10,000 people? They're drawing more people in their towns, spot show towns that we do, WCW or WWF, when they're there. I think a couple of times before I finished up with WCW at the spot shows, I know that a lot of these towns because I grew up around Huntsville, Alabama, I think if the people knew WCW was coming, they'd say, "This is big time wrestling coming

in." With so few people coming, if was promoted more like Jim and Smoky Mountain Wrestling does, they'd come out more. There isn't a whole lot to do in Huntsville, Alabama, or Lawrenceburg, Tennessee. Those towns I was in on a good night like Friday or Saturday, we didn't draw nothing. Just by the name WCW, if they knew about it and they liked wrestling, they'd come to see it.

WP: Now you're working again with Jim and Stan and the Rock 'n Roll Express. Does it bring back good memories?

BE: Yeah, really good memories. A lot of long matches in Louisiana, that's where Jimmy and I got our big break. We had fights about every night. That's where Jimmy's temper really comes from. They had protection then, but they didn't have it like they do now. Now they've got rails. They had rails, but they had nobody watching. We had to watch each other's back. When I was in the ring, I had to constantly look behind Jimmy (laughs). We fought all the time with other people.

WP: Why don't we go back to your beginnings. How did you break in?

BE: I was always a wrestling fan. I'm a sports fan. I like wrestling, football, basketball, baseball, all of them. I watched wrestling on TV and I got to meet a promoter by the name of Gus Gulas, who was Nick Gulas' brother. I know you've heard the name Nick Gulas before. I got to meet Gus and I sort of got to hang around with him. I started helping him put up the ring when I was 14, 15 or 16 years old. I hung around. I'd get in the ring, me and my friend, who I started with. He got discouraged with the business when we got started with making no money. I'm talking no money. Fifteen bucks,

30 bucks. It was kind of hard. This was in 1975. I did that and finally, some guy didn't show up and they put me in the ring. I already knew how to wrestle by watching it and by going into the ring and working out. I knew almost how to do all the basic stuff, but I was still green. I really enjoyed it. I still really enjoy it. From Alabama, I went to the Tennessee territory, which was Nick Gulas. It was right before the split between him and Jarrett. So they were fighting back and forth. Jarrett or Lawler would call me wanting me. I don't know if they really cared about the person or wanting to get somebody from the other organization. Huntsville was real easy for me to work out of. I was home every night. Plus, they ran Huntsville every Friday night. The longest trip was 150 miles for me.

WP: You were working for Gulas and Jarrett at the same time?

BE: Yeah and Harry Thorton ran Chattanooga. He had a TV show there. We had a lot of TV on Saturday afternoon and go right to the houses at night.

WP: Did you like working Tennessee?

BE: Well, it was fun. People came in and out. I remember Harley Race coming in and out. I wanted the chance to wrestle him. I got to wrestle him maybe two times after being there like six or seven years. I wanted to wrestle him to learn something.

WP: From there you went to Georgia?

BE: I made a couple of shots out of Georgia with Buddy Fuller.

WP: You were TV Champion for about a week.

BE: (laughs) Yeah, something like that. I went to Jarrett. I stayed there for six months. Robert Fuller was the booker

first. That was a long trip then. It was my own fault for leaving Georgia. I wanted to be in Nashville on Saturday night. They knew that and put me in Jonesboro, Arkansas. From Nashville, my house is only 100 miles. They put me in Jonesboro. Looking back, it wasn't a big deal, but back then, it was. Then I went to Georgia and back to Jarrett, then to Louisiana.

WP: In Tennessee, you worked with Koko Ware.

BE: I thought we were a pretty good team. We had a lot of good matches. Got a semi-push for a while. I enjoyed working with him. (laughs) I had a lot of heat just working with him. He had his head shaved and they gave us a little push. They hadn't seen a white guy and a black guy together. We worked some of those Tennessee towns, I don't know whether to duck down or what.

WP: Is that where you met Cornette and Dennis Condrey?

BE: I met Dennis in the Gulas territory. I met him there when I first started. He was coming in and out of there. I met Jimmy when I first went to Jarrett. When I met him, he was taking pictures in Louisville. I always got along with him good. He seemed like a nice guy back then, which he was. I never thought they'd make him a manager.

WP: He wasn't hyper enough back then?

BE: No, I just didn't know him. Jimmy's as hyper as he is on TV (laughs). When he came to Memphis to manage, he had on a little sailor's hat. I think he managed Dutch Mantell, the first guy he managed. I couldn't believe it. Then with Watts, they were swapping guys out. Watts came up and got me, Jimmy and Dennis and Jarrett got some guys from Louisiana.

WP: So at the time, you had just started teaming with them?

BE: No, we weren't teaming together. They just picked us.

WP: Was it Watts' decision to put the three of you together?

BE: Yeah.

WP: What were your feelings?

BE: Fine. I had no problem with it. My father-in-law was booking at the time. Bill Dundee was booking, he was taking the booking job down there. I knew they had long trips, but I talked to Watts on the phone and asked him and he said I'd make more money than I ever made in my career and he was right. I got along real good with him and I get along fine with him now. He's hard. That's the way you've got to be, I guess. Maybe he doesn't do things that everybody else likes, but he's in charge.

WP: Let's talk about Louisiana. Were you fighting for your life every day?

BE: Yeah. We did a lot of shit down there, man. We tarred and feathered Magnum. We painted a yellow streak up Dog's back one time. We even left Bill Watts laying. These were guys the people loved. Bill Watts is like a king down there. I don't know how he is now. But when they heard his name, they put it with wrestling and figured something's going to happen. When he came out of retirement and went with us, he did tremendous business. I think it was \$1 million in 14 days. That's a whole lot of money. At the time, we worked twice a night. A special match with Watts and Dog, who was under a hood. Rock 'n Roll was promised back to Jarrett and the Fantastics came in as did Koko Ware and Norvell Austin, who we also worked with. They got over big down there too.

WP: Who was your favorite to work with?

BE: Oh, Rock 'n Roll.

WP: Definitely?

BE: Oh, God, yeah.

WP: They were that much better?

BE: Yeah, they are. Yeah. I think if you ask anyone, they'll tell you. I don't know if they were that much better or we were used to wrestling each other. They were just fun. We made money down there, but we didn't have a chance to spend it. We got home at two o'clock in the morning, get up, I had my first son then. I got an apartment there, but I was home.

WP: You created incredible heat messing with Rock 'n Roll.

BE: Yeah. One night, when I first got there, it might have been the first time we worked with them. I think we first worked with Magnum T.A. and Mr. Wrestling II. My car, they poured sugar in the gas tank. This is at the motel I'm staying at. They knew where we were at. They put paint all over it, toilet paper, eggs, everything.

WP: Did you check in under assumed names?

BE: Yeah. I was at a place where I thought nobody would know who Dennis and me were. This was when I first started on the road. I wasn't that smart. Alexandria, Louisiana, doesn't really have a nice hotel anyway. It used to be that way. We stayed at the Alexandria Inn. The roads too. You drive 200 miles, you may drive 200 miles, but a lot of the time, it's two lanes. The places down there serve liquor at a drive-thru. They make your drinks for you. You've got to watch out for stuff like that.

WP: Did you ever have run-ins on the road?

BE: Oh, yeah. A bunch of times, at stores, everything. In the buildings, in the stores.

WP: Is that a good thing?

BE: It used to be a thing that they'd say was good. But it really wasn't. Now, there's no way it could happen. The lawsuits, this and that. As many as we had, we should have been sued a whole lot more. We got sued maybe two or three times.

WP: Cornette would be swinging his racquet around the ring making sure no one got close enough.

BE: It got so bad that when I got the racquet, I ended up hitting everybody including Jimmy and Dennis. I was just trying to get out of the way. I hit Grizzly a couple of times trying to get out. I didn't know. I didn't realize how bad it was.

WP: Cornette loaded that thing too.

BE: He had a horseshoe in it one time. I've seen him bend it over the top of guys heads. I think back on it, God.

WP: But this was something that was almost encouraged.

BE: Oh, yeah. We provoked them into doing it. That's the thing to ask now. We were asked one time by some lawyer. "You provoked them to come into the ring." In a way, you kind of do. You don't have the time to say, "I was

just joking."

WP: From Watts, you went to Texas.

BE: We went to Dallas, Texas. We didn't want to go there. We actually gave our notice the first night in. I hauled a truck with my stuff and Jimmy's stuff in it. I had a house in Hendersonville, Tennessee, and I took my stuff and his. We both had rented furniture, but we still had a lot of stuff. We got there and told them we wanted to work for Jimmy Crockett. Dusty had called us a couple of times. I talked to Jimmy and I talked to Dennis and we all agreed to go there. We got all the way to Nashville, which is the opposite direction, and we were told more or less that if we didn't go to Dallas, we might piss off somebody. That's what someone in Watts' office told us. I heard they so-called black balled you in certain territories. That was understood. We went to Dallas, they had a thing there called a Captain's Match. That's when the Midnight Express would wrestle the Fantastics, but in some towns, they'd only send me and Dennis to one town. It would just be one of us and I didn't like that. None of us liked that. We liked to wrestle together.

WP: How long were you working for Fritz Von Erich, six months?

BE: Yeah, six months. I liked it. The trips sometimes were short. But again, I had my mind on wanting to come to Crockett. We had a whole lot better

chance of making more money.

WP: What was Fritz like?

BE: I didn't have a whole lot of dealing with him. I know he didn't like us. He didn't like us. A couple of statements he made. One time, it was me, Jimmy and Dennis and Rip Oliver had a six-man with his boys, Kevin, Kerry and Mike. The next day was check day so in Fort Worth, Rip went in to get his check, which had nothing to do with us. Rip told us the story. Fritz was there and they were talking about the house that night. I don't know if it was good or bad. Fritz looked at him and said, "Hey, there's no way the fans will believe the Midnight Express can beat my guys." To me, that let me know we were heading downhill. That statement smartened me up really quick.

WP: You also got to work extensively with the Fantastics?

BE: We were with them two, three months in Louisiana while the Rock 'n Roll were back in Tennessee. They took their place. They actually went to Dallas before we did. They were good.

WP: But not as good as the Rock 'n Rolls?

BE: It's just that when you're so used to working with the Rock 'n Rolls. We meshed together and had good matches. They worked hard. They worked their butts off. We did too. But comparing the two, there ain't a whole lot of comparison.

Wrestling Perspective Back Issues You May Have Missed: The perfect compliment to the Bobby Eaton interview is the entertaining two-part Stan Lane interview which appeared in Volume II, Issues 7 & 8. If you loved the Midnight Express, and who in their right mind didn't, then these interviews are for you. Also, Eddie Gilbert's recent stormy departure from the USWA is by no means surprising. Volume III, Issue 25, features an in-depth look at Eddie Gilbert and his penchant for this type of behavior. It's an article definitely worth another look. These back issues can be ordered for \$1.25 each.

Wrestling The Way It Ought To Be?

By - Rodney Leighton

Fans involving themselves in the action has been fairly rare of late. To more or less quote Jim Cornette, "No one is getting excited enough to jump in the ring." Fans attacking wrestlers or managers does happen occasionally today, though not nearly to the degree of years past.

Conditions in professional wrestling today are much different than in the past. Some hate this fact, others believe it to be good, and still others refuse to believe it. One of the very real differences in professional wrestling is the rather sterile, overly protected, at a distance productions of the major promotions today as opposed to the down and dirty, right in your face action of wrestling pre-1985. Of course, security for the workers is much better, but the aura of being involved in the action is missing. How can one get excited about two overly costumed and bloated people doing something vaguely reminiscent of wrestling 30 or 300 feet away?

Smaller, regional, and independent promotions appear to be making a bit of a comeback. World Championship Wrestling will shortly fit that category as well, but that is perhaps another story. It may be time to take a look at when, how, and to what extent wrestlers, managers, and anyone else in the business, should protect themselves against overly zealous fans.

In Japan, to this day, wrestlers literally battle their way to the ring. This used to be the case in the "good old days." A

babyface would have to avoid being bruised and battered from the well wishes of his adoring fans while the heel would have to avoid being drowned in various liquids and garbage. Such things are, or at least were, part of the business.

Physical confrontations between fans and wrestlers, or managers, are another matter entirely. It is, naturally, always the heel who is attacked. Part of this means that he is doing his job to perfection. After all, the role of the heel wrestler, most managers, and the majority of valets, is to make the audience hate them. As shocking as a wrestling related riot was - and it would be a shock these days, wouldn't it? - such was an indication of how well the heel performers were able to work the audience.

For illustrative purposes, I would like to discuss a few incidents which I have personally been involved with or witnessed.

Back in the days when The Phantom of the Ring and I were teenagers, I was a total and full-fledged believer. A true mark, if you will. I believed in the reality of wrestling completely. The first incident I clearly recall occurred when I was about 17 in Prince Edward Island. Sweet Daddy Siki appeared on the card, there was basically no security, and ringside seats were about four feet from the ring with no barriers. Being young, foolish, and a babyface fan, I cheered lustily against Siki. At one point, he came outside the ring which

prompted me to pick up a potato chip bag and let it fly. The bag caught him squarely in the middle of the forehead, resulting in a two-minute confrontation which consisted of him saying, "Don't touch Sweet Daddy," while holding the front of my jacket, and me saying rather ineloquent things like, "Let go of me you black bastard!" I completely forgot how it ended. I spent a number of years being ashamed of myself for most of this incident, but just recently reached the conclusion that - with the exception of the racial aspect, which was not intended as such, but sure looks that way - I should not be ashamed. The incident, was simply a result of Siki doing his job well. He had a great ability to stir the audience to hatred and foolish actions. Today, I hate it when fans throw objects into the ring. For one thing, invariably some other than the intended person gets hit. For another, it's not a nice thing to experience. However, heels and managers who are doing a good job should expect to have things thrown at them. They are perfectly within their right, and character, to react with curses and threats. They should not physically touch a fan for the infraction of throwing something. The bottom line is fans should not throw things at wrestlers, but if they do, the workers should consider it a compliment to their abilities.

I recall an incident which somewhat opened my eyes. I forget the locale and even the wrestlers involved. Emile Dupree was a face throughout his wrestling career, at least in the

Maritimes. After he became a promoter, he remained very popular with the fans. Of course once or twice per season, the lead heel would put him over. Whatever wrestlers were involved worked some of the crowd into a frenzy. There were either four or six wrestlers involved plus the referee. About a dozen fans stormed the ring, if I recall correctly. I was sitting up in the bleachers. The babyfaces were down and out and the fans charged the ring to save them. Immediately it became the wrestlers and a referee against a bunch of fans. I found it quite interesting that Dupree threw more and harder punches and kicks than the wrestlers. I believe it died when Dupree got one guy square in the mouth with his famous mule kick. Despite this incident, his popularity never diminished.

In my early twenties, I spent some months in Calgary, Alberta. Stampede Wrestling was going full blast and I was in the old Corral every week, even if I had to skip dinner that night. There were several incidents there, but some bare mention.

Brusier Bob Sweetan worked Calgary in those days and one night he did a major number on a babyface. After the save was made, Sweetan made his run back to the dressing room. In order to get there, the heels had to go through a short corridor. This night, a small 5' 5" guy decided to do something about Sweetan. As Sweetan entered the aisle, the guy left his feet and caught Sweetan with a flying fist to the nose that knocked the Brusier cold. Unfortunately for that guy, there were other wrestlers around him. One, a guy known as Bob Pirie, whom I never heard of since, waited until the guy stood up, leaped in the air and kicked the guy once with each foot breaking his jaw in eight

places. I heard he was in the hospital for six weeks and yet when he tried to sue, his lawsuit went nowhere. No one was wrong in this case. Sweetan did his job well. The guy was wrong to hit him but it was understandable. Pirie was justified in coming to Sweetan's defense. Moral: Don't hit the wrestlers.

Carlos Colon was in the area about this time, using the name Carlos Bellafonte. I thought he was wonderful and one night a couple of wrestlers, I think it was Abdullah and a guy billed as Black Angus, teamed up on Colon attempting to burn out his eyes with a lighter or a cigar. In those days, I was young, hot-headed, and always sat ringside. The next thing I knew, I was there with my fist cocked, all set to take a shot at Abby. Before I could do anything though, I found myself surrounded by heels. A guy called Earl Black, who resembled a very young Cousin Luke (maybe it was), gave me a beautiful big smile, missing two front teeth and all. Luckily for me, discretion overcame valor and I retired to my seat. Here is a case where everything worked and everyone showed common sense.

Another incident I remember vividly was when someone set the hair of Gil Hayes on fire. Hayes was a local boy who was a bit ahead of his time in that he changed from face to heel with reckless abandon while never modifying his repertoire. This night he was a heel. I was up in the cheap seats and saw somebody from ringside light a book of matches and put them into the hair on Hayes' leg. I would have clobbered the guy if I was close, although some people thought it was funny. I relate this to show what people can and will do at wrestling matches. Any sensible person will immediately recognize this as a reprehensible act.

However, normally sane people do get carried away. Just act Sol Wachtler.

I once had a confrontation with a wrestler known as Killer Karl Krupp. Always a villainous German type, Krupp apparently liked this region, since he retired here. A number of years ago in a town called Truro, Krupp was doing a number on a personal favorite of mine. Krupp fell out on the floor, and I put the boots to him. Of course he got right up and came after me. I regretted it almost immediately, not because he gave me a bloody nose and a few bruises, which I deserved, but because I don't believe in kicking someone when he's down and, even though I still believed it to be real, I had reached the point of believing that guys should not be attacked. But I did it. However, a couple weeks later, in a small town called Windsor at an agricultural fair it came to pass that I decided to sit in the balcony at the free wrestling show. I got there early and it was dark and gloomy up there. As I went to find my seat, one Killer Krupp was leaning against a railing. As I went to pass, he stuck his foot out and I stepped against it. He turned and looked at me. I looked him in the eye and said, "Sorry." He nodded and turned around. I think we both knew we were not thinking about a nudged foot. An example of foolishness followed by sensible interaction between a wrestler and a fan.

The final incident I will discuss occurred just a short time ago. Perhaps fortunately, I was up in the rafters, but I had a good view. A somewhat local independent came to a small town near here. They brought six wrestlers: four Maritimers as well as Angel "The Cuban Assassin" Avecado, who has worked this area so much he might as

well be one. There was literally no security, nor were there any barricades. Avecado has been a heel for about 30 years, except for one brief stint a couple of years ago as a face. In the final match, he made use of his infamous foreign object. It was a tag team match and Avecado was hiding the thing in his boot. I couldn't see what it was, but traditionally Avecado uses a popsicle stick wrapped in tinfoil. After a while, a kid started throwing little balls of something at Avecado.

I said to myself, "This brat is going to get himself in trouble." Some years ago, I saw this guy knock a woman flat on her back for spitting on him. Sure enough, following the match, Avecado grabbed a chair and threatened to clobber the kid. Fortunately, the referee got in there in a hurry and common sense prevailed. Avecado was probably within his rights to threaten bodily harm, although I'm very happy he didn't carry through with the threat.

The answer to preventing these types of situations are barricades around the ring, the wrestlers entrances, and drum tight security. Just the sort of thing that has taken the fun and ambiance out of professional wrestling. Personally, I would like to see the guys accept, as most have over the years, that such things occur. Bring back wrestling the way it used to be and hope that everyone retains some common sense when the inevitable emotions that often override common sense occur.

The History Of The Stereotype: Part V The Sixties And The Seventies

By - The Phantom Of The Ring

When we last left wrestling in the fifties, the stereotype was not only going strong, but dominating the characterization of the game. Wrestling was truly regionalized, thanks in large part to cooperation between rival promoters. This, in turn, enabled each promoter to meet the specific needs of his "market" and adjust accordingly. Thus, Antonio Rocca, who could draw thousands to Madison Square Garden in New York, but could only draw flies in St. Louis, could dominate East Coast wrestling. Verne Gagne, who was strong in the Midwest, but weak on both coasts, could make plenty of money for the Midwestern promoters, whom he would later come to dominate. The same was true of Lou Thesz, in "Bohunk" areas such as St. Louis, Kansas City and Indianapolis.

Thesz, although marketed as an ethnic in the St. Louis area when he debuted in the mid-thirties, transcended the idea

of ethnicity for the most part by the early sixties. He grew to become a true legend of the sport, frequently cited by the press as the only honest wrestler in an otherwise dishonest game. Still, he couldn't draw on the East Coast to save his life. Only if he were matched against a Rocca would the crowds file in, for wrestling hadn't completely shed its ethnic feathers.

The sixties were basically a continuation of the fifties; there was little reason to change. Television has just gone kaput and wrestling entrenched itself, waiting for fortune to turn around. Because promoters believed that a whole new audience would discover the game - the wrestling audience basically undergoes an almost complete transformation every four to five years - there was no need to change it. The idea was to stick with what worked in the past and there would be no need to panic.

If anything, wrestling came up with new enemies of "people" to foist on an unsuspecting audience. Indians would still go strong throughout the decade but vanish in the seventies. This was due to the decline of the western more than anything else. Wrestling fans were not politically conscious any more then that they are now. They are much more jingoistic and respond like Pavlov's dogs to any patriotic or xenophobic stimuli.

The combination of patriotism and xenophobia worked miracles in reviving the game during the sixties and seventies. Two new ethnic types came into prominence: Russians (Communists) and Arabs. Communists were a natural, after all the Cuban Missile Crisis was the focal point of the early part of the decade, Communist sympathizer Lee Harvey Oswald assassinated the president, Khrushchev was banging his foot noisily at the

United Nations promising to bury us, and we were fighting communism in Vietnam. Hence, a veritable plethora of "Russians" invaded the rings. Names such as Boris and Nicolai Volkoff, Alexis Smirnoff, Ivan Koloff, and Boris Breshnikov began to eclipse the standard German heels such as Waldo and Fritz Von Erich (Fritz even turned babyface), Hans Schmidt, Kurt and Karl Von Brunner, Karl Von Hess, and the best German heel of the sixties, Baron Von Raschke. Stu Hart should be given special credit for taking the communist gimmick one step further with his "Viet Cong" lead heel in the mid-eighties, Ho Chi Lau, who was a combination of the despicable Oriental and the dastardly Communist. Never mind that Lau was Japanese.

Still compared to the Arab, the Russian was a lovable sort. After all, for all his communism, the Russian was still white. The Arab, on the other hand, was a dirty smelly thing who lived in tents, dressed in sheets, and did God knows what to camels. At least, this is the image presented by wrestling promoters. The lead Arab heel of the time was the Sheik, one Ed Farhat in real life, who came to Detroit wrestling. Let it also be said for Detroit that it was the first promotion to feature the Russian heel. Not bad for this line of work.

The apex of all this came during the Six-Day War in 1967 between Israel

and the Arabs. To most people, this was a frightening display of bloodshed, but to Ed Farhat, this was a gold mine, the Mother Lode. Why not a feud between an Israeli and an Arab to liven up the gate? Farhat had the Arab (himself), and found the Israeli in Mark Lewin, an authentic Jewish wrestler. So much the better in case the press wised up to all of this. To make sure the customers realized the importance involved, Lewin wore a pair of trunks emblazoned with the Star of David. This was one of the few times since the thirties that a Jewish wrestler dressed accordingly. In the past, the wearing of the Star of David was to alert the Jewish customers, of which there were many in those days, who to root for. Now it was to have political implications - the sound byte in its earliest incarnation. The feud sold out Cobo Arena and would have been the hit of the summer were it not for the Detroit race riots, which effectively scared the customers away. No matter though, for Farhat then hit upon the brilliant idea of headlining Bearcat Wright in a series of matches where, when he got into trouble, his opponent would usually mention the phrase, "Give up nigger!" in a loud enough voice so as to be heard all the way into the cheap seats. Since a large portion of the wrestling audience in Detroit was made up of African-Americans, this gimmick, needless to say, went over like gangbusters. Odd how quickly things can change, however, as during a match in Vancouver, Wright's opponent yelled

the same thing and received only embarrassed titters in response.

While the Sheik would soon fade from center stage, the Arab gimmick lived on and is still with us today, albeit in a new form with the recent turning of Sgt. Slaughter, one-time proud American and despiser of foreigners, into a lackey of the evil Iraqi General Adnan and his despicable toady, Colonel Mustafa, who once regaled audience as the Iranian Iron Sheik, but no matter: an Arab is an Arab, even if he happens to be an Iranian, and, technically, not an Arab. This time, the gimmick went over like a lead balloon because the brains behind the WWF, Vince McMahon, failed to realize the seriousness of the Gulf War on American sensibilities.

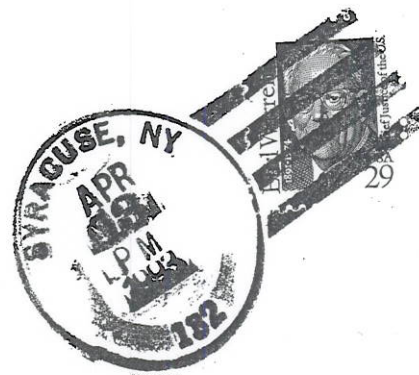
The Russians have fared little better, due in large part to the break-up of the Soviet Union and the end of that country as a threat to American peace. For the most part, wrestling is out of the ethnic stereotype business largely because its new target audience does not see the world in terms of ethnicity. The new target audience, as any fan who attends live matches knows by now, is the 17-and-under set, who see the world not in terms of politics, but in terms of entertainment, having themselves been brought up in the Global Village. In our final part, we shall see how wrestling changed gears and look at the last remaining vestige of stereotyping: the African-American.

More Back Issues You May Have Missed: Wrestling's foremost historian, The Phantom of the Ring, has received critical acclaim for his History Of The Stereotype series. If you've missed parts I-IV, which appeared in issues 28-31 of Wrestling Perspective, these issues are still available for \$1.25 each, with the exception of issue 31, which is available for \$2.50 and also features part II of the very entertaining Jimmy Garvin Interview.

Next Issue:

- *Part II of the Bobby Eaton Interview!*
- *The Final Installment of The Phantom's History Of The Stereotype series!*
- *Paul returns to the writers chair...*
- *More....*
- *Don't miss out, if your subscription expires with this issue, renew today!*

Wrestling Perspective
PO BOX 401
CAMILLUS, NY 13031-0401



Dave Prizak
2278 Hidden Creek Court
Lisle, IL 60532-1168

First Class Mail

IF YOUR ADDRESS LABEL READS 33 YOUR SUBSCRIPTION EXPIRES WITH THIS ISSUE